

May 2008

Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre Central Washington University

Introduction

Central Washington University (CWU) seeks approval to offer a degree program leading to a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in Theatre. This proposal involves a significant re-structuring of offerings by the Theatre Arts Department at Central Washington University. The department currently offers a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre degree with six specializations. Those six concentrations are General Theatre Studies, Performance, Technology and Design, Management, Youth Drama, and Theatre Education. A minor in Musical Theatre is currently offered as well. The intent of the department is to retain only the BA specializations in General Theatre Studies and Theatre Education, replacing the remaining BA specializations with the new BFA in Theatre. Three BFA specializations would be offered: Performance, Design and Technology, and Musical Theatre. The minor in Musical Theatre would be retained.

Program Need

The Seattle area is home to the third-largest theatre community in the United States. In recent years, professional and semi-professional theatre companies have been established or expanded in Eastern Washington as well, including Soap Lake, Leavenworth, Yakima and Tri-Cities. A Seattle Repertory Theatre report in June 2006 noted that a critical shortage of qualified theatre technicians in Washington forces it to recruit out of state. A theatre in Yakima has partnered with CWU to overcome a shortage of trained technicians there so the city can bring in touring shows to perform locally.

Employer demand beyond the specific examples mentioned is difficult to quantify because employer demand data for theatre-related occupations is not disaggregated from more general categories of occupations. However, data that is available is consistent with the suggestion that career opportunities and employer demand exist for graduates with training in theatre. The *State and Regional Needs Assessment*, published by the HECB in 2005, projected about 1,700 annual job openings in the category of “Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media Occupations” – jobs requiring a baccalaureate degree or higher. HECB staff further analyzed this data and projected a similar number of annual job openings for the category “Editors, Writers, Performers.”

Theatre graduates prepare for occupations as actors, managers, producers, and designers; and as technicians for lighting, costumes, and scenes. Music, television, and teaching offer additional avenues of application for studies in theatre. CWU further notes that previous graduates in theatre have gone on to a wide variety of careers outside of theatre. Theatre Arts programs build a broad

foundation in liberal arts, using skills in collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and other broadly applicable knowledge and skills associated both with theatre arts and with many other disciplines in the humanities.

Student demand for the program is strong. Enrollment in existing Theatre Arts programs at CWU has grown substantially this decade. In 2001, the department enrolled 76 students in a major or minor program in theatre. By 2007, enrollment had grown to 140 students – an 84 percent increase in six years. There are several additional indications of student interest in BFA programs in theatre, at CWU particularly, including:

- Forty-three students scheduled musical theatre auditions at CWU in April 2008.
- Of 42 visits to the marketing office for theatre at CWU over the past 12 months, 25 potential students indicated an interest in a BFA program.
- Of 46 students who joined CWU's Theatre Arts Department in fall 2007, 30 indicated interest in the new programs being developed.
- In July 2007, 27 students from seven states attended a Musical Theatre Summer Conservatory at CWU, and all students indicated interest in a BFA program in Washington.
- CWU has been asked about BFA programs by 59 of 82 students interested in theatre who have attended the performing and visual art college recruitment annual event in Seattle over the past three years.

Community demand is demonstrated by the 47 performances delivered in 2006 for the Youth Theatre tour. These shows, in 23 communities around Washington and Oregon, were presented to an estimated 20,000 teachers, parents, and elementary school students. Central Theatre Ensemble, a semi-professional production company established in 2003, presents a full season of theatre and offers a variety of other artistic and cultural enrichment opportunities on the Ellensburg campus, from reader's theatre and student-produced plays to musical reviews, new play readings and other events. Students, faculty, staff, and alumni work and volunteer for community arts organizations of the Kittitas Valley including art galleries, museums, and organizations concerned with musical theatre, dance, ballet, and civic life.

Program Description

The proposed Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre would be pursued through one of three specializations – Performance, Design and Technology or Musical Theatre. It would be a traditional full-time program offered on the Ellensburg campus starting in fall 2008. Student auditions would be required for admission. Initial enrollment would be 18 FTE students, increasing to 96 FTE at full enrollment in 2013. The department anticipates admitting 8 to 12 students to each of the three specializations each year.

To receive a BFA in Theatre, a student must complete 11 courses for 35 credits and another three-credit course chosen between two options. An additional 72 credits beyond these 38 core credits are required in course options tailored to each specialization, bringing the total number of credits required for the BFA degree to 110. The existing BA in Theatre requires 75 credits. Therefore,

the proposed BFA program requires significantly more focused, sustained coursework of greater breadth and depth than existing programs. All courses required for the new program are currently in the curriculum at CWU and are offered regularly.

The program needs additional space to accommodate recent and expected enrollment growth. Additional rehearsal and studio classroom space is needed since scheduling for acting and movement courses is already being impacted by current enrollment demands. Up to 2000 square feet of studio classroom space is needed for acting and movement classes, and up to 5,000 square feet of space is needed for dance classes and rehearsal space. Office space also is needed to accommodate growth of faculty and staff. Somewhat longer-term facility needs facing the department include a computer lab classroom space for technical courses and a sound technology lab for sound engineering, recording, and the maintenance and storage of equipment.

Master Plan

The proposed program would offer more students an opportunity to earn degrees in Washington. Currently, 110 students are enrolled in the CWU Department of Theatre Arts BA program. With the addition of the BFA, the department anticipates serving 160 majors. This would continue the steady growth the department has witnessed this decade. While BA programs in theatre are readily available at public baccalaureate institutions in Washington, no public institution offers the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in theatre. The BFA is a significantly more focused, intensive program of study and practice, requiring 35 more credits focused in the major than is required for the BA degree.

The only comparable programs presently available in the state are at Seattle University and Cornish College of the Arts. The proposal would create a unique opportunity for Washington residents to pursue this field of study at a public institution, and it would be the only program of its kind in Eastern Washington. CWU faculty and one external reviewer of the proposal suggest students may be leaving Washington at present in order to pursue BFA opportunities in theatre.

Diversity

The Department of Theatre Arts states a particular interest in recruiting and retaining a diverse student population. Efforts undertaken by the department in recent years related to diversity include the following:

- Each year, the Youth Tour brings a dramatic production to 20,000 students and teachers, primarily in rural Washington where diverse school populations are present and growing.
- In 2005, the Department of Theatre Arts, the Yakama Tribe, and the Clymer Museum produced *Bird Woman: The Story of Sacagawea*, using Native dance specialists to teach traditional dance through the play and workshops.
- In 2006-07, the department presented a bilingual production *Bocon!* and associated workshops in conjunction with CWU's GEAR UP program.
- The department created a Spanish language Web page in 2006.

- The department's curriculum incorporates study of diversity issues through courses such as Staging Gender, Ethnic Drama, Contemporary World Drama, and Asian Drama.

The department also participates in institution-wide efforts to enhance diversity in the student population served and the faculty and staff hired by CWU.

Program Cost

No new faculty would be needed to offer the BFA program. A current faculty recruitment by the department is related to enrollment growth this decade. Approximately 6 2/3 FTE faculty would be assigned to the program, primarily from the Theatre Department. Faculty from five other departments would teach courses fulfilling BFA elective requirements.

Additional staff would be needed to support the program. An existing 0.75 FTE production management position would be increased to full-time and a new staff position for the scene and costume shop would be added prior to 2010, for a total of 3.5 FTE staff.

Revenue for the program would come from state appropriations and tuition and fees. Expenditures would exceed revenue for the first three years as the program builds enrollment. Starting in year four (2011-12 academic year), revenue would exceed expenditures. At full enrollment in 2013, costs per FTE drop to \$8,049. By comparison, according to the *Education Cost Study* for 2005-06 published by the HECB, total direct cost per FTE student at CWU was \$4,086 for all undergraduate disciplines and \$4,519 for disciplines classified as Arts and Letters. At the upper-division level, those costs were \$4,914 for all disciplines and \$6,149 in the category of Arts and Letters.

Program Quality and Assessment

All departments at CWU are required to conduct an internal review every five years and produce a report submitted to an external reviewer who visits the campus for three days. The external reviewer provides a report to the Vice President for Undergraduate Studies at CWU, including commendations and recommendations. The department responds to the external report at the time, and again one year later when it outlines changes made as a result of the review. The last review of the Theatre Department was completed in 2005.

The department has committed to pursuing accreditation for the BFA by the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST) in 2009-10. The timing for seeking accreditation would coincide with the next regularly scheduled review, allowing the department to conduct one review serving both purposes.

Curricula for theatre courses offered by CWU are based on NAST standards. Recent graduates have been professionally involved with theatre companies nationwide. CWU graduates have interned or been employed by theatre companies across the state of Washington, including the

Seattle Repertory Theatre and Seattle Opera; and local theatres in Tacoma, Everett, Olympia, Yakima, and Tri-Cities. They also have interned or been employed by theatre companies in California, Montana, Idaho, and Nevada; and across the country in Atlanta and Washington DC.

Quality would be assured through various efforts beyond the described departmental reviews and accreditation. The Student Advisory Council, which meets weekly, would review and offer feedback on policy and program changes under consideration. Plans call for surveying graduating seniors to assess satisfaction with the program and identify future plans and job prospects. Faculty would meet semi-monthly to discuss and evaluate new programming and individual student learning outcomes. Students would have to audition to be admitted to the program, and would have to pass a juried portfolio evaluation each spring to remain in the program. Initially, the department would assess the program through two additional efforts. Each student would complete a Student Evaluation of Instruction form after each course, and an annual review of the program by faculty and staff would examine program goals, outcomes, and any potential policy adjustments.

Staff Analysis

The *Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education in Washington* envisions increasing degree production in the state. The CWU degree proposal for a new Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre supports this central goal of the Master Plan by expanding degree offerings in a growing department and by supporting and encouraging further growth. Since no public institution in the state offers a comparable program, the proposed program further supports increased degree production by expanding the array of public baccalaureate degree program opportunities.

The proposed program may allow more Washington students to stay in the state to attend college, rather than go out of state. It also could improve affordable access to rigorous baccalaureate level theatre programs, since the only in-state alternatives are offered by two private institutions in the Seattle area.

By avoiding duplication with programs offered by other public institutions, the program represents a judicious use of public resources. The program operating budget reflects a reasonable cost-per-FTE student. The budget submitted by CWU does not describe how the required and desired facilities associated with the new program are to be acquired or financed.

The program is designed for completion in four years if students enroll at CWU as freshmen. According to the proposal, students who transfer with an associate degree “can expect to complete the degree within three years of being admitted to the program.” The longer time-to-degree for transfer students appears due to the 110 credits required in this major (the BA program in Theatre requires 75 credits). While it might be possible for some transfer students to complete the degree after just four total years of study, the department states that the transfer student with a two-year degree “most likely” would require three years at CWU after transferring to complete the degree.

The department invited community colleges to confirm course content for courses that may be covered by articulation agreements; and therefore, carry automatic transfer to the Theatre Arts Department at CWU. Eight community colleges have confirmed their course content. Annual

visits are made to community colleges to provide information and workshops for faculty and students. Notwithstanding these and other significant efforts the proposed BFA program is better suited for direct entry by freshmen than as a transfer pathway.

External reviews obtained by the Department of Theatre Arts are one of the few weaknesses of the proposal. The current job title is the only information provided about the qualifications of the external reviewers (David Lee-Painter, Professor of Theatre at the University of Idaho, and Tammis Doyle, Drama and Dance Department Chair at Bellevue Community College). In addition, their analyses are lacking in detail.

One curricular suggestion was made - and accepted by CWU - that circus and fencing classes satisfy movement course requirements for the musical theatre specialization. The Idaho reviewer remarked of the curriculum only that it has appropriate academic breadth and depth; course sequencing is well thought out; and CWU has chosen to follow NAST standards.

The reviewer from Bellevue Community College questioned the timing of the auditioning process for prospective students. In response, CWU made changes to allow high school seniors to audition in order to permit freshman entry to the program. Both reviewers endorse the proposal and have evident high regard for the department, referring to its “excellent faculty” and expressing confidence the program would be “highly successful.” The external reviewers did not share much of their reasoning or evidence for the positive conclusions reached.

Program and student assessment activities suggest a strong level of quality is designed into the proposal. Regular departmental review, initial programmatic review through student evaluations, and the annual faculty and staff examination of program goals and outcomes - combined with the effort to seek early NAST accreditation - are indicative of a strong commitment to a high-quality program. The required student assessments (including the qualifying audition, the annual juried demonstrations for remaining in the program and the final graduation assessment) and the rigorous 110-credit major requirement are consistent with a high-quality approach. Semi-monthly faculty discussions would bring together assessment at the program level and the level of individual student learning.

The program supports CWU’s mission through its liberal arts foundation, applied emphasis, opportunities for creative expression, and by offering a rigorous curriculum in an atmosphere that cultivates creative endeavor. CWU has identified interdisciplinary programs as a “sphere of distinction” and the collaborative curriculum, including required coursework from up to seven departments across campus, is consistent with that institutional priority.

Recommendation

After careful review of the program proposal and supplementary information provided by CWU in response to follow up questions and comments by HECB staff, HECB staff recommends approval of the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre program at Central Washington University. The HECB Education Committee discussed the proposal during its May 5, 2008 meeting and recommended approval by the full Board.

RESOLUTION 08-11

WHEREAS, Central Washington University proposes to offer a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre; and

WHEREAS, The program would support the *Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education* by expanding access to rigorous baccalaureate degree program opportunities; and

WHEREAS, The program's liberal arts foundation, applied emphasis, and opportunities for creative expression would support Central Washington University's mission; and

WHEREAS, The program's rigorous yet collaborative curriculum, including coursework from up to seven departments across campus, would be consistent with Central Washington University's institutional priority regarding interdisciplinary programs as a "sphere of distinction"; and

WHEREAS, The program would not unnecessarily duplicate existing programs in Washington; and

WHEREAS, The program's assessment activities, in addition to its commitment to seek early accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Theatre, indicate a high level of quality;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Higher Education Coordinating Board approves the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Theatre at Central Washington University, effective May 22, 2008.

Adopted:

May 22, 2008

Attest:

Bill Grinstein, Chair

Roberta Greene, Secretary